

Session 6

November 17, 2019

GOD'S WILL AND THE GLORY OF GOD

John 11:1-4, 38-45

On the rare occasions that we visit New York City, we try to see a Broadway play. As much as I get absorbed in the music and the drama going on onstage, I can't help but wonder what must go on behind the stage to make a show like *Phantom of the Opera* come to life. There must be a lot going on that we never see! And so it is with our lives here on earth. So much of our attention is focused on the stage of the physical here-and-now, that we often forget what's going on behind the scenes, where God is at work.

In this week's text, we return to the city of Bethany and the familiar story of the raising of Lazarus. The drama unfolds in three scenes.

The reason (vv. 1-4). Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (v. 4). It's often difficult for us to reconcile things like sickness with God's glory. It seems rather unfair that one should suffer so that God might be magnified, but that conclusion is hard to escape. Like the man born blind "so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:1-6), Lazarus' sickness and subsequent death were used by God to display something much greater than what his sisters had in mind when they sent for the Lord (v. 3). The venerable commentator Matthew Henry said it well: "Let this reconcile us to the darkest dealings of Providence, that they are all for the glory of God: sickness, loss, disappointment, are so; and if God be glorified, we ought to be satisfied." But I imagine that Mary and Martha were hardly satisfied when this illness that would "not end in death" (v. 4) most certainly did!

The raising (vv. 38-44). Much happens in the intervening verses. The discussion with His disciples (vv. 7-16) reinforced Jesus' explanation that God was at work behind the scenes. In verse 11 He announced, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, *but I'm on My way to wake him up.*" Then in verses 14 and 15, Jesus told them bluntly, "Lazarus has died," and added, "I'm glad for you that I wasn't there *so that you may believe.*" By the time Jesus reached the house, He had bolstered the faith of Martha, by telling that her brother would rise again (v. 23), and He reassured Mary as well, by telling her "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die" (vv. 25-26). Thus, by the time Jesus stood outside the tomb, all of the background was in place: the disciples had been briefed and Martha and Mary had been prepared. The crowd was gathered for the final act. Again, Jesus reiterated that in the midst of all the suffering and sorrow, God would be glorified. And Jesus' prayer removed any possible doubt: "Father, I thank You that You heard Me. I know that You always hear Me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, *so they may believe You sent Me*" (v. 42).

The result (v. 45). The miracle itself accomplished at least three great objectives. First, as in most miracles of the Bible, the individual involved was blessed. In this case, Lazarus was raised to life. Imagine the flood of emotions he must have felt—confusion, amazement, joy, exuberance, and praise—as those grave clothes were peeled away, and the darkness of the grave gave way to light! Second, those closest to Jesus, His disciples and Mary and Martha, had their

initial faith strengthened, as they witnessed the “resurrection and the life” display Himself in bold reality. Third, the miracle proved once again that God is involved the background, advancing His plan, bringing Himself the glory, even in the midst of our suffering.